



***TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE
NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE***

Thursday, January 26, 2022

*Alexandra Daum, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Economic and Community Development*

*Senate Resolution for Alexandra Daum of New Haven to be Appointed as Commissioner
of Economic and Community Development*

Senator Duff, Senator Looney, Representative Concepcion, Representative Godfrey, Senator Kelly, Representative Yaccarino and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. My name is Alexandra Daum, and it has been my privilege to serve as Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) over the past three years. I am honored to have received Governor Lamont's nomination to lead the agency over the next term and am grateful for your consideration of my qualifications to do so.

I want to begin by articulating what I believe is the mission of the Department of Economic and Community Development. If confirmed as the next Commissioner of DECD, it will be my personal mission and the mission of the Agency to make sure Connecticut is a place where people want to live, work and visit. Employers need to understand why this is a great place to run a business. Employees should be clamoring to live here and for those who can't live or work here, I want them to at least visit us often and spend some money with our tourism and cultural partners.

I want to acknowledge that DECD's ability to execute on its mission is inextricably linked to the work of many other key state agencies and offices. Workforce development, transportation accessibility and speed, housing affordability, environmental permitting and energy costs are just a few of the key factors that influence DECD's ability to attract new businesses and employees to the state. While we're not here today to discuss the nitty gritty of any of these topics, I want to make sure you know that I understand how crucial these topics are to DECD's success and that I don't plan to work in a silo. I pride myself on my ability to build strong relationships within complex organizations and I have done this already with Commissioners Dykes, Eucalitto, Mosquera-Bruno and Dr. Vallieres, among others. I will work collaboratively and swiftly with the excellent team of experts Governor Lamont has appointed to make sure DECD can best serve our clients – Connecticut's businesses, cultural organizations and community development partners.

I am passionate about serving DECD's clients and growing the Connecticut economy, and I believe I am well qualified to do both of these things. I appreciate your consideration of my relevant private sector experience and enthusiasm for public service.



My background before working for the Lamont Administration was almost entirely in the private sector. I have worked with large corporations including as a management consultant at Bain and Company whose clients are household names. On the very other side of the spectrum, I have been a small business owner myself. As a college senior I founded a wristwatch company and designed, manufactured and sold women's wristwatches. I grew the business to roughly \$500k in revenue all while finishing my degree and working at a full-time job after graduation. I know how to talk to folks making decisions on a large corporate scale, but I can also relate to people running small businesses, having lived the ups and downs of entrepreneurship myself. Both skills are crucial to supporting existing Connecticut businesses and attracting new ones to the state.

I spent the summer of 2012 volunteering for President Obama's reelection campaign and was lucky enough to be chosen for a White House Internship the following summer between the two years of my MBA program. These experiences debunked the public sector myths I had constantly heard in private sector circles and among my MBA peers. Rather than being environments in which nothing got done I found both jobs to be fast-paced, demanding and impactful when done right. My respect for public sector work was further solidified when I worked for a residential real estate developer in the Bay Area as a Project Manager. My company worked on ambitious, large-scale, private-public partnerships and the only way to get these done was to work closely with municipal employees. These municipal employees were so impressive. They were motivated experts working as hard as their private sector partners to do the right thing for their citizens, and they inspired me to one day be on their side of the table.

That day came in early 2020 when I learned about the role of Deputy Commissioner at DECD. In many ways that role was a dream job as it combined private sector content with a public sector mission. It also enabled me to continue the community development work I had loved as a residential developer, but instead of working on one or two projects at a time I got to work on dozens. As Commissioner, I would look forward to expanding my scope to oversee all of the Agency's initiatives and to selling my adoptive home state to potential employers, residents and anyone else who will listen!

If I have the opportunity to serve as DECD Commissioner, I will have four key areas of focus.

- **Performance-based employer incentives:** There are a host of reasons for an employer to want to locate in Connecticut – from our excellent quality of life to our innovative workforce. Financial incentives will be a part of many employers' decision to move to Connecticut but those incentives should be contingent upon successful job creation and capital investment as opposed to provided upfront. DECD should continue to incentivize growth and new jobs with “earn as you grow” incentives.
- **Small business support:** 48% of all Connecticut employees work at a small business, according to the Small Business Administration. These are businesses likely without a big legal department or a sophisticated Chief Financial Officer. The State can play an important role in making sure these small businesses get off the ground initially and weather unforeseen challenges along the way. Access to capital is important, but technical assistance is just as necessary. There's no sense in getting a business loan if you aren't able to leverage that loan to grow your business and pay down the debt successfully.



- **Strategic community development:** Through the Brownfield Municipal Grant Program, the Connecticut Communities Challenge Grant Program and other similar programs, DECD invests significant capital into development projects around the state. This has been done and will continue to be done in a thoughtful way that prioritizes A) in-fill development in dense areas taking advantage of existing infrastructure, B) partnerships with developers and municipalities with strong track records and significant investment of their own capital C) development that encourages use of transit and pedestrian infrastructure D) equitable development that prioritizes mixed-income environments and community connections.
- **Inclusive arts, tourism and marketing efforts:** As DECD markets Connecticut as a place to live and have fun, it is imperative that we represent everything and everyone in the State. We're a diverse State in terms of racial and cultural representation and in terms of the physical assets and environments we offer. DECD's tourism office has done an excellent job over the last year of showcasing Connecticut's broad offerings. You'll find images of beaches, hikes and historic towns, but you'll also see images of our urban environments, multi-cultural offerings, downtown arts assets and more. As Commissioner, I would continue this effort to showcase everything Connecticut has to offer in our marketing efforts.

In closing, I want to reiterate my gratitude to Governor Lamont for this opportunity and for his economic leadership over the past four years. Thank you to the committee for your time and consideration and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Thank you,

Alexandra Daum